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MIGRATION AND MERITOCRACY: *Support for the idea that hard work will get you ahead in society among nine migrant groups in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany*

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Abstract


The belief that hard work can lead to advancement in a society stands as a key motivation for migrating. The literature on migration, however, has viewed meritocratic attitudes in a different light, arguing that a belief in a meritocratic society can cause migrants to be more accepting of inequalities and blind them to structural explanations of it. To add to this debate, I therefore study whether migrants generally perceive their recipient countries to be meritocracies or not, as well as what can explain these attitudes. I answer these questions using a survey collected among nine migrant groups in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany. The results show that all the migrant groups perceive the three recipient countries as meritocratic, though there are differences among the groups. The article further studies what these variations in the belief in the meritocratic society can be explained by.

Keywords

migration • meritocracy • attitudes • discrimination • socialisation

Introduction

The belief in a meritocratic society should be an important part of the motivation to migrate, as migrants often arrive in a new country hoping and believing that if they just ‘work hard and play by the rules’, this will be rewarded (Hesford & Kulbaga 2003; Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Moroşanu & Fox 2013). The literature from the field of migration research, however, paints a very different picture. Studies of different migrant communities have emphasised that having meritocratic values, or viewing a society as meritocratic, plays a large role in how the recipient country is perceived. This is, however, not in a positive sense, as – in these studies – meritocratic perceptions are used to understand or rationalise inequality (Hesford & Kulbaga 2003; Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Moroşanu & Fox 2013). One example of

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this is a study of Polish migrants in the UK by Lopez Rodriguez (2010), which shows that mothers teach their children meritocratic values as a way of making sense of differences in achievement. Here, the perception of society as meritocratic thus led a migrant group to accept having a lower status in society than natives. Similarly, Wiley, Deaux and Hagelskamp (2012) showed that among Latino migrants in New York, meritocratic values tend to make migrants more accepting of inequality and less willing to take part in political action. Outside the literature on migrants, similar critiques of meritocratic values have also been put forward. In short, the argument is that the perception that society is meritocratic can create an acceptance of inequality and the failure to advance in society, which then becomes attributed to personal effort. This individualisation can therefore overshadow more systemic or structural explanations (Ellerman 2005; Hochschild 1995; Littler 2017; Meeus 2016).

All the literature on the impact of meritocracy stems either from qualitative interviews or from surveys among very particular populations. This means that all the studies tend to look at what would be the 'best case' in terms of finding an impact of meritocratic values. To add to this debate, I therefore study whether migrants generally perceive their recipient countries to be meritocracies or not, as well as finding possible explanations for these attitudes. By switching from the qualitative 'best case' of marginalised groups to the quantitative 'average case' of nine very different migrant groups, this article provides a different take on the subject. Further, the research also moves outside the US context, which has been dominant in the literature on meritocracy, to the European context.

I answer these questions using the 'Migrants' Welfare State Attitudes' survey (MIFARE survey. Bekhuis & Hedegaard 2016). This survey was conducted in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany among migrants originating from Poland, Spain, Great Britain, Japan, China, Turkey, the Philippines, Russia and the USA. The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark are comprehensive welfare states, although of different regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990). These countries also all have a history of immigration and therefore large populations of first-generation migrants (between 11% and 15% in 2015, according to Eurostat). The migrant groups represent very different countries of origin in terms of culture and economies. This is used in the article to test out hypotheses on the impact of economy and socialisation. The selection of migrants from different countries of origin, where this was possible (explained later), also meant that the groups do not represent the biggest groups in the country.

In this section, I presented the purpose of the article. In the second section, I outline the theoretical arguments, followed by the hypotheses that guide the article. Next, the data, the variables and the methods applied are outlined. Then, the results are presented, and finally, the results are discussed and put into perspective in the last section.

Theory on determinants of meritocratic attitudes

To outline the theories and the hypotheses stemming from them that guide the article, I draw on the articles on migration and meritocracy cited earlier (Hesford & Kulbaga 2003;

Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Meeus 2016; Moroşanu & Fox 2013; Wiley, Deaux & Hagelskamp 2012). Further, I consider theories derived from other fields, although all but one of them are related to migration. Collectively, this revealed five theories that – I hope – can further our understanding of why migrants might view society as more or less meritocratic.

For the first theoretical assertion, I simply propose that the amount of time spent in the recipient country matters. Migrants often come to a new society with an idealised perception of it and its institutions, but over time, this notion might fade. Studies of migrants' attitudes have revealed this exact pattern, both between and within generations. For instance, Wiley, Deaux and Hagelskamp (2012) showed that first-generation Latino migrants in New York are more supportive of the idea that hard work will lead to success than the second generation. They attributed this to a combination of the second generation having experienced more discrimination and the first generation possibly having a more optimistic view of the opportunities available in society. This difference between the first and second generation is also displayed in other studies of migrants' attitudes regarding social trust and belief in societal institutions (Dinesen & Hooghe 2010; Maxwell 2010; Röder & Mühlau 2014). However, fewer studies have looked at the effect of spending time in the recipient country within the first generation. An exception to this is Röder and Mühlau's (2012) study of the support for political institutions among migrants. In this study, they found that the effect also wears off within the first generation of migrants: 'Migrants give credit to the host countries, but this credit fades away the more migrants are exposed to the working of these institutions and as the memories of the country of origin become more distant' (Röder and Mühlau's 2012: 790). Studies of meritocratic attitudes in the USA have also shown that the belief in a meritocratic society tends to fade with age, especially among minorities and women. This age effect is attributed to older people having been exposed to more 'non-meritocratic' elements, i.e. experiences in which reality does not support the meritocratic ideals (Hunt 2007; Reynolds & Xian 2014). Based on this research, I suggest that this fading effect might also exist within the first generation, and therefore, I outline the first hypothesis regarding the impact of time:

H1: Migrants who arrived more recently to the recipient country have a stronger belief that one can get ahead in society with hard work.

For the first hypothesis, following the literature on meritocracy, I argue that time matters in the image of the recipient society. From here on, I only draw on the more general literature on migrant attitudes, as the literature on migrants and meritocracy has been more preoccupied with the consequences of it than the determinants of it. For the second hypothesis, I argue that migrants who have experienced more success in the recipient country also have a more favourable view on the ability to advance through hard work. This leans heavily on what is called the self-serving bias within the branch of social psychology called attribution theory. Attribution theory deals with how people make sense of the events around them by attributing responsibility. Generally speaking, events can be attributed to internal factors, such as own effort, or to external factors outside of the individuals' control (Kelley 1967; Kelley & Michela 1980). A subset of this theory points to biases in how these attributions

of control are made, specifically that people make them in a self-serving manner: 'When explaining positive actions and experiences, their attributions emphasise the causal impact of internal, dispositional causes, but when identifying the causes of negative events, they stress external, situational factors' (Forsyth 2008: 249). Thus, people who are more successful will perceive society as more meritocratic, in part because they attribute their success to their own hard work. On the other hand, people who are less successful will perceive it as less meritocratic, in part because they attribute their lack of success to external factors. This hypothesis draws heavily on the original formulation of the term 'meritocracy', which, although it draws on older linguistic roots, only dates back to 1958. Young (1958) coined the term in a dystopic novel to describe a society in which the idea of a meritocracy is successfully used to maintain power and thus form a new social class. Although a positive connotation of the term is mainly applied in everyday language, this negative formulation lives on in academic literature on the subject (Hesford & Kulbaga 2003; Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Moroşanu & Fox 2013). Based on these arguments, I outline the second hypothesis on the impact of success:

H2: Migrants who have a higher income have a stronger belief that one can get ahead in society with hard work.

The third hypothesis is, to some degree, the flipside of the second hypothesis on success, as it focuses on discrimination. Again, I draw on studies of meritocratic perceptions from the USA showing that minorities tend to be less convinced that society is meritocratic (Reynolds & Xian 2014). This difference in the perception of a meritocracy is explained in terms of 'non-meritocratic' elements, which have two sub-dimensions: advantages related to knowing the right people and disadvantages related to discrimination. In this hypothesis, I focus on the latter and argue, in line with the results, that people who have more experiences of discrimination have less of a belief in a meritocratic society. Similar results on the impact of discrimination also exist in the literature on migrants' attitudes. An example of this is the study by Dinesen and Hooghe (2010), which found that migrants who perceive their group as subject to discrimination are less likely to acculturate to the trust level of the recipient country. Safi (2010) also showed that differences in life satisfaction between migrant groups can largely be attributed to whether the migrant groups perceive their group as being subjected to discrimination. Based on this, I outline the third hypothesis on the impact of discrimination:

H3: Migrants who believe that discrimination against migrants from their country is more prevalent have a weaker belief that one can get ahead in society with hard work.

The three hypotheses outlined here describe attitudes about whether society is meritocratic as a function of the life situation. However, attitudes might also be affected by the dominant perceptions in a society. In the fourth hypothesis, I therefore argue for the impact of socialisation. A number of recent studies of migrants' attitudes have suggested that socialisation aspects of both the country of origin and the recipient country might be of

importance. One example of an 'origin country effect' is provided by Luttmer and Singhal (2008), who found that migrants' preferences for redistribution are strongly affected by the preferences in their country of birth. They demonstrated this by comparing the attitudes of immigrants to the USA with the attitudes in the origin country using the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). Seibel and Hedegaard (2017) also showed similar effects in terms of the impact of gender values in the origin country on support for formal childcare in the recipient country. A 'recipient country effect' has also been established in a number of studies following the same overall approach. These studies revealed that migrants' attitudes, in most cases, are very dependent on the attitudes of the natives (Dinesen 2012; Reeskens & van Oorschot 2015; Röder & Mühlau 2014). For instance, Breidahl and Larsen (2016) demonstrated that migrants' gender values are highly dependent on the gender values of the natives. Given that it is unlikely that migrants select their new countries on the basis of gender values, this has been interpreted as an adaption effect. The two approaches are drawn together by Voicu and Vasile (2014), who found that migrants' life satisfaction is affected by the general level of life satisfaction in both the origin country and the recipient country. They argued that acculturation to new attitudes is therefore dependent on the frames of reference of both the origin country and the recipient country, as well as the ties to both contexts. This creates what Voicu and Vasile (2014) called 'dual contextually', whereby migrants draw on both the old and the new in forming their own attitudes. Following the foregoing approach, I outline the next two hypotheses:

H4a: Migrants from countries where the belief that hard work will enable one to get ahead in society is stronger have a stronger belief that one can get ahead in society with hard work.

H4b: Migrants who move to a country where the belief that hard work will enable one to get ahead in society is stronger have a stronger belief that one can get ahead in society with hard work.

Where the socialisation hypotheses argue that the cultural context the migrant leaves and arrives to matter, the fifth and final hypothesis takes an economic approach. This hypothesis draws on the theory of relative deprivation, which holds that feelings of poverty and need are perceived not only in absolute terms but also in relative terms. The argument of relative deprivation theory is that when considering whether a person is poor, it is not enough to consider whether basic needs such as food and housing are being met, but also whether the person has the resources that one could expect to have in that society (Stark 1984). Using this theory, migration researchers have explained why migrants are more likely to migrate if they have a lower socioeconomic status in their origin country. The argument goes that this is driven by a transnational version of relative deprivation in which migrants, by moving to a richer country, have a chance to 'get ahead', compared to those in their origin country, even if they stay at the same position in society in the recipient country (Stark & Taylor 1989; Stark & Wang 2000). For instance, Stark and Taylor (1989) showed that Mexican families are

more likely to have a member of the household migrate to the USA, even if that person would be at the bottom of US society, as the households' overall status is improved. Migration researchers, such as Collier (2013), have also argued that low-income immigrants have the most to gain from moving from a poor country to a rich country, as their income multiplies manifold by moving to a more productive economy. Following the same idea, the argument is that migrants from poorer countries would have a stronger belief that they can get ahead, because they are comparing against a relatively poorer origin country. Based on this argument, I outline the fifth hypothesis on relative income differences and their impact:

H5: Migrants from poorer countries have a stronger belief that one can get ahead in society with hard work.

Data and variables

Data

To test the hypotheses, I used the MIFARE survey (Bekhuis & Hedegaard 2016). The MIFARE survey was collected among 10 migrant and native groups in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany. In both Denmark and the Netherlands, the MIFARE team had the opportunity to sample from population registers, which enabled them to test for the representativeness of the survey and to approach migrant groups that are small in numbers. In Germany, the MIFARE team contacted strategically selected municipalities. The sample included only migrants who were 16 years or older when they migrated and 18 years old when they were surveyed. The 10 migrant groups were from Poland, Romania, Spain, Great Britain, China, Japan, Turkey, the Philippines, Russia and the USA. For Germany, however, a group from the Philippines was not included, as this group was too small to systematically locate without a population register. A net sample of between 900 and 1,100 was drawn from each group, depending on exceptions of non-response being higher among non-Western groups (Hedegaard 2017). In total, 10,069 people filled out the questionnaire, online or offline, in the mother tongue or in Danish, Dutch or German, resulting in a response rate of 35%. Natives from the three countries were not included in the analysis, as migrants were the group of interest. Romanians were also not included, as attitudes in the origin country were not available for this group. This left a net sample of 8,083, which was reduced to 6,404 after all respondents with missing answers were deleted listwise. For the group sizes after the deletions, see Table A1 in the Appendix.

For the Danish part of the survey, I was able to test non-response using the population register. This non-response analysis showed a slight overrepresentation of the following groups: young, non-citizens and those in the workforce; but, generally, the differences were minimal (Bekhuis & Hedegaard 2016). Of course, I was not able to directly apply these findings to the surveys collected in the other two countries, but considering that the methods and sampling used were the same in Holland, I see no reason to expect large

differences. However, considering that the sampling in Germany was very different from that in the other two countries, this finding might not be generalisable to that part of the survey.

Variables

For the dependent variable, I used the following statement: 'In general, people can get ahead in [Denmark/Netherlands/Germany] if they work hard', to which the respondents could declare that they 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. For this question and all others, 'don't know' or 'cannot answer' options were left out of the analysis. This can be argued to be a fairly narrow operationalisation of what a perceived meritocracy is. The module on social inequality from the ISSP measured this concept in various ways, including perceptions of fair salaries and perceptions of whether society should be more – or less – meritocratic (Duru-Bellat & Tenret 2012; Kunovich & Slomczynski 2007). It includes, from 2009 and onwards, a battery of explanations of the ability to 'get ahead in society' using 10 items covering the impact of hard work, as well as elements of discrimination, connections and personal ambition (Reynolds & Xian 2014; Roex, Huijts & Sieben 2018; Xian & Reynolds 2017). Its results show that hard work is indeed perceived to be one of the main factors, but also that personal ambition and access to education are important. Overall, I believe this is a valid, albeit a bit narrow, measure of perceived meritocracy.

To match the hypotheses outlined herein, a number of independent variables were used or created. First, to account for compositional differences, I controlled for age in years and the sex. Work situation was also included using the following categories: full-time employment versus part-time work, full-time student, disabled or sick, retired, looking after the home and something else. Education was measured using the internationally comparable International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) codes. The reference category was the group with no formal education, which was compared against groups with primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary, lower-level tertiary and upper-level tertiary education. For this, the highest level of education achieved in either the origin country or the recipient country was used to measure the highest level of education. To measure the impact of time spent in the country, a variable on the year the migrants entered the country with the intent to stay for ≥ 3 months was used.

Perceived discrimination against own group was measured using the following question: 'Some say that migrants are being discriminated against in [Denmark/Netherlands/Germany]. Others say this is not the case. How often do you think that the following groups are discriminated against in [Denmark/Netherlands/Germany] – migrants from the [country of origin]?'. The migrants could answer that this was 'very often', 'often', 'sometimes', 'almost never' or 'never' the case. This wording of the question follows the annual European Social Survey, upon which the two studies that found an effect of discrimination on attitudes among migrants are based (Dinesen & Hooghe 2010; Safi 2010).

The socialisation effects were measured in two ways. The impact of attitudes in the country of origin was generated using the ISSP on attitudes towards social inequality, module 4, from 2009. In the ISSP survey, the question that also serves as the dependent variable for this article was posed: 'To begin we have some questions about opportunities for getting ahead ¼ how important is hard work'. The only difference was that the answers were based on a slightly different five-point scale. This was then transformed into a country average, and the mean score in the origin country was applied to each of the nine migrant groups. The impact of attitudes in the recipient country was constructed in a similar way. Here, each respondent was given a mean score corresponding to the mean score of the natives in the recipient country. Since Germany was not included in that version of the ISSP, information regarding Germany was drawn from the MIFARE survey instead. Both measures only provide a rough estimate of attitudes in the origin and recipient countries and thus are not directly tied to individual respondents. However, similar measures have been used in other studies that compare migrants' attitudes from a socialisation perspective (Dinesen 2012; Reeskens & van Oorschot 2015; Röder & Mühlau 2014; Seibel & Hedegaard 2017; Voicu & Vasile 2014). A comparative study also shows that this method does not overestimate the acculturation of immigrants, as has been speculated by some (Hedegaard & Bekhuis 2018).

Finally, to account for the differences in relative wealth between the countries of origin, I included gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars for 2015 from the World Bank's online database. There are some issues with comparing GDP levels across borders, but the PPP does account for part of the differences in the value of a dollar between countries. The GDP in PPP dollars in the origin country (CO) is subtracted from the GDP in the recipient country (RC) to account for differences between the recipient countries (GDP in CO minus GDP in RC). This variable was also included as a fixed value for each migrant group. There was only a weak correlation between the country means of whether hard work is rewarded and GDP in PPP dollars of 0.002 ($p > 0.001$, not shown), and therefore, one variable is likely not a proxy of the other.

Analysis

The results are presented in two steps. First, I show how the different groups answered the question that constitutes the dependent variable. This is done to create an overview of whether the recipient societies are perceived as meritocratic, and how these perceptions differ between the groups. For this step, I apply listwise deletion to make the results comparable with the regression models. Second, I apply an ordinary least squares (OLS) model to test for the impact of the independent variables outlined herein. The OLS model allows me to compare the relative explanatory power of the variables outlined on the basis of the hypotheses.

Figure 1 shows that there is a general belief in the idea that hard work will be rewarded. For all the groups, a majority agree that hard work can enable one to get ahead in society. This belief, however, varies quite a lot between the groups. A comparison between the

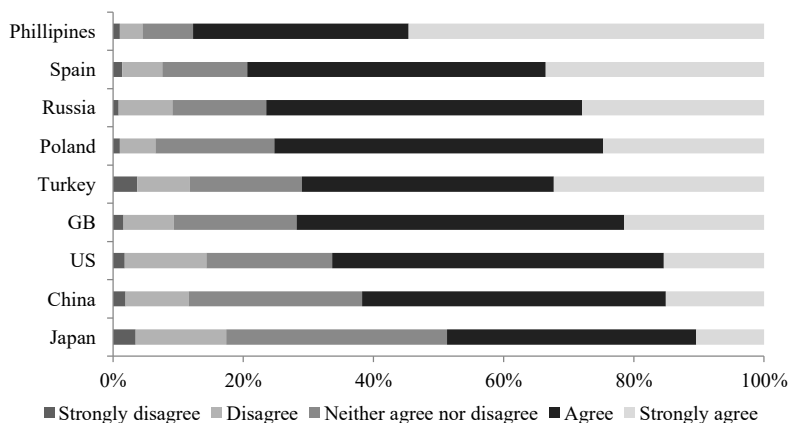


Figure 1: Is hard work rewarded? Percentages that agree or disagree that 'In general, people can get ahead in [recipient country] if they work hard'.

Notes: N total:6,404. A listwise deletion is applied here so that the respondents included are the same included in the regression models in Table 1. The answers are presented by country of origin, sorted by mean score. GB = Great Britain.

groups reveals that the Filipinos, Spanish, Russians, Poles and Turks tend to have a stronger belief in a meritocratic society. In particular, the Filipinos stand out here. This might be connected to the fact that they were not surveyed in Germany, where the general support for the idea is a little lower among all groups (see Figure A1 in Appendix). At the other end of the scale, the Japanese, Chinese, Americans and Brits have a lower overall belief in a meritocratic society.

From this figure, it seems that migrant groups from richer countries tend to perceive the recipient countries as less meritocratic, in accordance with Hypothesis 5. However, aside from this, there are no simple geographical or cultural explanations for the ranking. Therefore, I proceeded to test the hypotheses outlined using a series of regression models.

Table 1 shows the impact of the different independent variables outlined herein. In the first step, the compositional effects are added to account for the rather large differences between the groups in some of the variables (shown in Table A1 in the Appendix). This reveals that although there are large differences between the groups in terms of age, gender composition, education and the typical workweek, this explains very little about the variation. In fact, the only significant, but still rather small, effects are from the work situation when comparing those in full-time work with those in part-time work (-0.031) and those looking after the home (-0.044). It thus seems that migrants' view of society is

Table 1: Explaining the attitudes towards whether hard work is perceived to be rewarded

	Compositional effects		Full model	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Age	-0.017	(0.001)	-0.021	(0.001)
Gender (reference: man)	-0.017	(0.027)	-0.031*	(0.027)
Workweek (reference: paid work, full time)	Ref.		Ref.	
In paid work, part time	-0.031*	(0.036)	-0.026	(0.036)
Full-time student	-0.019	(0.051)	-0.018	(0.051)
Unemployed	-0.024	(0.053)	-0.009	(0.053)
Sick or disabled	-0.009	(0.090)	-0.006	(0.089)
Retired	0.020	(0.065)	0.033*	(0.065)
Looking after home	-0.044**	(0.048)	-0.043**	(0.046)
Something else	-0.021	(0.076)	-0.019	(0.075)
Education (reference: no formal)	Ref.		Ref.	
Primary	-0.009	(0.096)	-0.006	(0.095)
Lower secondary	0.012	(0.091)	0.013	(0.089)
Upper secondary	0.024	(0.075)	0.028	(0.073)
Post-secondary non-tertiary	0.000	(0.078)	-0.001	(0.076)
Lower-level tertiary	-0.008	(0.071)	-0.022	(0.069)
Upper-level tertiary	-0.030	(0.082)	-0.048*	(0.081)
Length of stay in years			-0.013	(0.001)
Income (11 groups)			0.038**	(0.005)
Discrimination against CO migrants (1–5)			0.205***	(0.013)
Meritocratic values in the CO (mean)			0.036**	(0.063)
Meritocratic values in the RC (mean)			0.062***	(0.066)
GDP in PPP \$ in CO			-0.166***	(0.000)
R²	0.06		0.16	
Observations	6,404		6,404	

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. See Table 1A in the Appendix for the mean values for the variables for each migrant group. CO = country of origin. OLS = ordinary least squares. RC = recipient country. SE = standard error. OLS model with coefficients, significance levels and standard errors reported.

almost unaffected by the composition of the group. This lack of an effect also changes only marginally in an application of the variables related to the hypotheses.

Moving to the full model, it is clear that all but one of the variables connected to the hypotheses have a significant effect, but also that the effect sizes vary quite enormously. Starting with the effect of time spent in the recipient country, this does not work as expected, as the belief in a meritocratic society does not seem to fade (-0.013). I also tested how this variable performs as a categorical variable, to see if there is some aspect of non-linearity (not shown), but the result was the same. Based on this, I reject Hypothesis 1.

Income does have a small but significant effect (0.038^{**}) on whether a society is perceived to be meritocratic. The fact that the effect is positive means that migrants with higher incomes also perceive society as more meritocratic. This thus follows the argument outlined in the theory section that migrants who are more successful think that it is possible to work their way up in society, because they attribute their success to themselves to a higher degree (Forsyth 2008; Kelley & Michela 1980). Hypothesis 2 on the impact of success on meritocratic perceptions is thereby confirmed.

As for the impact of perceived discrimination against migrants from the respondents' country of origin, I find that this has a significant and strong effect (0.205^{***}). Since the effect is positive, and the scale for perceived discrimination against the group runs between 'very often' and 'never', this means that less perceived discrimination leads to a stronger belief in a meritocratic society. This is in line with the idea that 'non-meritocratic' experiences can undermine the belief in meritocratic ideals (Hunt 2007; Reynolds & Xian 2014; Xian & Reynolds 2017). Hypothesis 3 is thereby confirmed.

Looking at the socialisation effects, I find that attitudes in both the country of origin and the recipient country have an impact on meritocratic attitudes. The impact of attitudes in the country of origin is small, but significant (0.036^{**}). The fact that the effect is positive means that the stronger the belief in the country of origin, the stronger is the belief that the migrants have. It does seem that at least part of the belief in this travels with these first-generation migrants. The attitudes among the majority of the population also have a small and significant impact on attitudes (0.062^{***}). The effect works in similar ways in that living in a country where there is a stronger belief in a meritocratic society has a tendency to 'rub off' on migrants. The effect is about double the strength of the effect of the origin country, and thus, although I find that both contexts matter (Voicu & Vasile 2014), I also find that the latter effect is stronger. Both Hypothesis 4a on the country of origin effect and Hypothesis 4b on the recipient country effect are thus confirmed.

Finally, I find that differences in income between the origin country and the recipient country have a negative effect on attitudes towards whether a society is meritocratic (-0.166^{***}). The fact that the effect is negative means that coming from a relatively poorer country, when comparing the countries' GDP figures, leads to stronger support for the idea that one can get ahead in society though hard work. Following the theories presented on migration and relative deprivation, this suggests that migrants from relatively poorer countries are relatively more satisfied with the meritocracy in their recipient country,

possibly because they consider themselves to be moving up in the world in a relative sense. Hypothesis 5 is thus confirmed.

To sum up, I find that overall, migrants support the idea that society is meritocratic, as measured through a question on whether one can get ahead in society though hard work. This, however, varies quite a bit between the migrant groups represented in the survey, as 87% of the Filipinos agree with this statement, while this is only the case for 50% of the Japanese. Differences in income, perceived discrimination, socialisation and relative income can all help explain part of why some migrants see society as more (or less) meritocratic. On the other hand, compositional effects, such as age, gender, education and workweek, explain very little to none of the variation.

Conclusion and implications

The literature on migration provides a highly critical view of meritocracy, arguing that the idea of a meritocracy might be repressive, as it can cause migrants to internalise failures, accept inequalities and reject collective action. However, such conclusions are premised on the fact that migrants believe that society is meritocratic. Therefore, in this article, using the MIFARE survey collected among nine migrant groups in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany, I study whether and why some migrants hold a stronger belief in a meritocratic society than others. The nine migrant groups are from Poland, Spain, Great Britain, China, Japan, Turkey, the Philippines, Russia and the USA.

The results showed that there is an overall strong belief in a meritocratic society among migrants in the three countries. Although this belief was shared by all of the groups, there were significant differences among the groups. It was strongest among the Filipinos, among whom 88% agreed that it is possible, and weakest among the Japanese, among whom 'only' 50% shared that belief. To explain this, I outlined a number of hypotheses, mainly based on the literature on migration and migrants' attitudes. The results showed that the amount of time lived in the country did not matter regarding attitudes towards the ability to get ahead in society. This result is different from that reported by Wiley, Deaux and Hagelskamp (2012), who showed that first-generation Latino migrants in New York are more supportive of the idea that hard work will lead to success than the second generation. However, experiences in and between generations might not be the same. The first generation migrated and thereby chose the country, whereas the second generation did not make such a choice.

On the other hand, higher income did lead to a stronger belief in the ability to work one's way to the top. The results also showed strong socialisation effects, in that both the attitudes in the origin country and the recipient country mattered. The migrants thus bring some of their views from the origin country but also adapt to the views in the recipient country. Discrimination also mattered in that migrants who perceived their group as being subject to more discrimination also had less belief in a meritocratic society. Finally, migrants from poorer countries have a stronger belief in a meritocratic society. This was argued to be

an effect of a sort of global relative deprivation, whereby migrants from relatively poorer countries feel that they are 'moving up in the world' to a higher degree.

These findings have some limitations. First, as discussed in more detail in the data and variables section, the dependent variable provides a somewhat narrow view of what a meritocracy is and how it is operationalised. Although I do believe that the question of whether one can get ahead in society with hard work is fitting, it ignores many other dimensions. In particular, aspects that have been described as 'non-meritocratic' elements, i.e. experiences in which a society does not uphold the meritocratic ideas, are missing. I partially capture this with the variable on discrimination, but that part could be explored more fully. Second, this study only includes first-generation migrants who were 16 years or older when they moved. As a result, only this first-generation view is considered, which might also be the reason why time spent in a country does not matter regarding the migrants' attitudes. Given that other studies have found that there are differences in attitudes between generations, this is a limitation (Wiley, Deaux & Hagelskamp 2012). Finally, the migrant groups included in this study were chosen in part because I was able to link them to attitudes in the origin country. The groups are, therefore, not necessarily representative of migrants in the three countries as a whole, but they do provide interesting insights into the views of society among migrant groups.

Future studies should consider turning the study on its head. Instead of showing and explaining why migrants have more – or less – meritocratic values, additional studies could explore the consequences of these values. Much of the literature referenced throughout this article argued for a negative impact of these values, which the article shows are prevalent among migrants. It is not within the scope of this article to explore the consequences of having these attitudes, but it would be very interesting to ascertain whether migrants who believe in a meritocracy are also less likely to internalise failure, reject collective action and generally be more apathetic citizens (Hesford & Kulbaga 2003; Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Moroşanu & Fox 2013).

Appendix

Table A1: Mean scores by group for all variables for respondents included in tables and models

	PHI	JPN	CHI	POL	RUS	SPA	GB	TUR	USA
Is hard work rewarded? (1–5)	4.34	3.42	3.63	3.93	3.93	4.05	3.84	3.82	3.66
Gender (% women)	0.90	0.72	0.64	0.63	0.75	0.54	0.37	0.48	0.52
Age	42.09	43.63	35.16	40.14	40.86	36.22	47.36	43.08	43.90
Workweek									
Paid work, full time	0.40	0.45	0.49	0.61	0.43	0.64	0.61	0.43	0.58
Paid work, part time	0.23	0.20	0.12	0.14	0.18	0.13	0.13	0.11	0.13
Full-time education	0.07	0.07	0.22	0.03	0.09	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.06
Unemployed	0.09	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.09	0.06	0.03	0.14	0.06
Sick or disabled	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.01
Retired	0.03	0.06	0.01	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.10	0.09	0.06
Looking after home	0.11	0.13	0.08	0.09	0.12	0.03	0.05	0.10	0.08
Something else	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.01
Education									
Upper-level tertiary	0.76	0.65	0.78	0.32	0.68	0.63	0.61	0.23	0.56
Post-secondary non-tertiary	0.09	0.19	0.08	0.12	0.09	0.14	0.09	0.05	0.10
Upper secondary	0.13	0.09	0.11	0.49	0.19	0.17	0.22	0.36	0.28
Lower secondary	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.25	0.02
No formal	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.07	0.08	0.02
Length of stay									
A year or less	0.09	0.16	0.18	0.09	0.10	0.18	0.10	0.03	0.15
2–5 years	0.17	0.23	0.27	0.21	0.18	0.38	0.16	0.08	0.19
6–10 years	0.27	0.16	0.21	0.33	0.17	0.16	0.14	0.11	0.15

Continued
Table A1: Mean scores by group for all variables for respondents included in tables and models

	PHI	JPN	CHI	POL	RUS	SPA	GB	TUR	USA
11–20 years	0.27	0.24	0.26	0.14	0.43	0.16	0.22	0.35	0.20
+20 years	0.19	0.22	0.07	0.23	0.11	0.13	0.38	0.43	0.31
Income (11 groups)	7.24	8.10	7.27	6.46	7.15	8.00	8.48	6.56	8.57
Happiness (0–10)	7.79	7.50	7.10	6.82	7.02	7.29	7.49	6.51	7.44
Discrimination of CO (1–5)	3.22	3.51	3.11	2.78	3.24	3.64	3.90	2.59	3.63
Is hard work rewarded? (mean in CO)	4.36	3.84	4.19	4.08	3.87	3.86	4.13	3.99	4.38
GDP in 1,000 PPP \$ in CO	7.70	37.32	14.45	26.50	24.45	35.20	42.51	21.15	57.29
N total by group	456	780	721	729	931	816	814	448	709

Notes: CO = country of origin. GDP = gross domestic product. PPP = purchasing power parity. PHI = Philippines; JPN = Japan; CHI = China; POL = Poland; RUS = Russia; SPA = Spain; GB = Great Britain; TUR = Turkey.

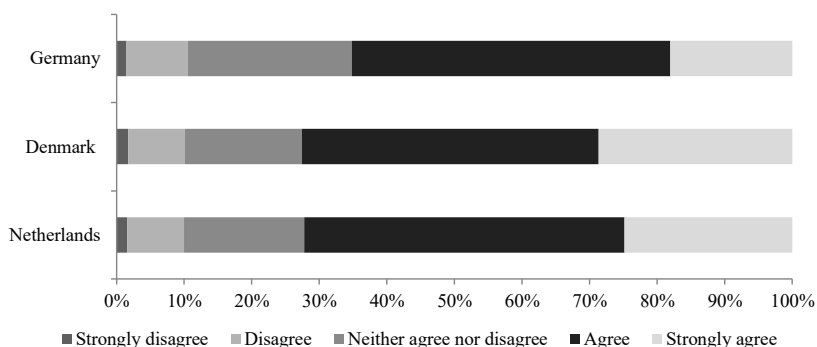


Figure A1: Is hard work rewarded? Percentages that agree or disagree that 'In general, people can get ahead in [recipient country] if they work hard'.

Notes: N total: 6,404. A listwise deletion is applied here, so that the respondents included are the same included in the regression models in Table 1. The answers are presented by recipient country.

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